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THE FUNCTIONING OF A READING COMMITTEE.

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THE READING COMMITTEE SHOULD GUIDE THE TOTAL READING PROGRAM. THE READING CONSULTANT FUNCTIONS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK ESTABLISHED BY THE READING COMMITTEE. THE COMMITTEE SHOULD PROVIDE THE CONSULTANT WITH THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ABOUT THE STATUS OF READING IN THE DISTRICT--DISTRICT TEST RESULTS, TEACHERS' BACKGROUNDS, INDIVIDUAL STUDENT RECORDS, BOOK INVENTORIES, AND CURRENT READING PRACTICES. ON THE BASIS OF THIS DATA, THE STATUS OF THE READING PROGRAM CAN BE DETERMINED, AND NEEDED CHANGES CAN BE INITIATED. THE SUCCESS OF THE READING COMMITTEE DEPENDS UPON THE COOPERATION OF EVERYONE INVOLVED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (SEATTLE, MAY 4-6, 1967). (BK)

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THE FUNCTIONING OF A READING COMMITTEE

To be presented at the Session, "Reading Committees," Thursday, May 4, 1967.

Once the major task of organizing a reading committee has been completed, it becomes the responsibility of the school and the reading committee to find the means whereby the committee functions in the most feasible manner. Robinson and Rauch, in their book GUIDING THE READING PROGRAM (1), state that the function of the reading committee, "...is to promote an ever progressing reading program." They then go on to say that, "The major task of the committee should be to evaluate the reading program continually and to take necessary steps towards improving the program--with the consultant taking a leadership

role in making and implementing decisions."

In some school districts reading committees have been organized for the sake of having a reading committee listed on a committee roster. When this is the case, much friction can develop between the committee and consultant. Since neither one has been apprised of their responsibility, each is likely to resent what it considers the others interference.

The Reading Committee should be a policy making body who develops a broad framework within which the consultant is able to function. Rather than being concerned as to whether Miss Jones teaches phonics, or Miss Brown individualizes instruction, their tasks should include such things as an evaluation of district-wide reading scores, adequacy of materials, innovations needed, experiments to be conducted and areas to be strengthened. The consultant's role is to see that within this large framework each individual teacher is following through on the best teaching practices of which he or she is capable. Under no circumstances should the reading committee become involved in evaluation of individual performances of teachers. Should major areas of differences arise between the reading committee and the consultant, steps should be taken to involve a higher administrative officer or officers who can carefully evaluate the questions and suggest possible solutions. It is

unfortunate that sometimes a consultant feels threatened by a reading committee. Such a committee is not there to evaluate the consultant's role, but rather to provide information and insight which enables him to function more effectively.

One of the first responsibilities of the reading committee is to obtain information concerning the reading status within the school or school district. For this purpose many resources should be explored. Some of these include:

Test results -- Results of standardized tests by grade and school as well as district-wide results often give indication of general areas of weaknesses. Comparison of test scores with national norms will help the committee determine whether theirs is a basic problem of overall improvement or one of refinement to improve only specific aspects of the program.

Teachers might also be asked to evaluate the tests of pupils in their classes to determine discrepancies among scores obtained by individuals. They should be asked to report students whose scores are one or more years below the district norm or whose scores deviate from class performance.

Reading consultant's records and observations -- If a reading consultant has been employed in the school

for any length of time, no doubt he has been able to accumulate facts and information which should be passed along to the committee. These might include the number of students who are in need of remedial help; current teaching practices, either favorable or unfavorable; attitude of the teachers towards the improvement of reading; and areas of weakness he has noted.

Teacher background -- Teacher background as it pertains to courses taken in the teaching of reading or experience in the teaching of reading would be helpful to the committee in order to determine in-service needs. Personal interviews, observations by impartial teams, or questionnaires can be used to note ways reading is taught in the content fields, appreciation of literature is developed, materials utilized and/or instruction is individualized.

Records -- A survey of available records indicating students' individual reading progress through the grades should be ascertained. Teachers should be asked what information concerning the child's reading progress they would find particularly helpful.

Book inventory -- A complete inventory should be made of all basal and supplementary materials available as well as ditto materials, workbooks, trade books, films, filmstrips,

records and other machines which are used regularly by the teachers in the teaching of reading.

Parent reactions -- By means of informal discussion groups, PTA programs, individual contact with other parents, the community's attitude towards the reading program within the school should be explored.

Administration reaction -- Administrators should contribute their ideas in relation to the total reading program and some of the areas they feel are in need of improvement. Determining the administrations attitude towards increased emphasis upon the teaching of reading is also important.

Current reading practices -- An examination of the current practices carried out by teachers in their classrooms should be made to determine what methods and approaches are being utilized; what experimental projects are underway, or what approaches warrant experimentation.

From this mass of information, it is then possible for the reading committee to evaluate the present status of the reading program and note its strengths and weaknesses. A combination of factors will determine the directions in which the committee will probably decide to move. If the problem is one of a lack of materials which hinder teachers' performances, then this might

becom the first order of business; if teachers lack the background and experience in reading to use a sufficient supply of materials, the committee may want to consider in-service education; if the school is doing a good job teaching reading, but parents react adversely to the reading program, then the committee might wish to explore means of informing the community about the school's total reading program. Thus it can be seen that the first direction of the committee will depend upon the reactions as obtained from the information gathered.

Often a reading committee which is just beginning to function will feel that the myriad problems presented to them are overwhelming. Committees have been known to try to focus upon all weak areas at once. It is often better to place major emphasis on one or two phases of the program, lightly shoring up the other aspects. The development of a sound reading program is something that takes place over a number of years and cannot be accomplished in one year.

During the phase when information is being gathered, the committee may wish to divide into small groups making it easier for a few people knowledgeable in specific areas to focus upon these needs. The full committee, working closely with the reading consultant, should then evaluate this material from a total school approach. Once the committee has focused their sights

on the area, or areas of concern, then new sub-groups may be utilized to plan corrective devices. As an example: if the committee decides their first order of business is the development of in-service courses, then teachers and administrators with special area consultants might divide the responsibility. One group may explore in-service courses for the elementary teachers and another a program for secondary teachers. In this way it is possible for people who are most knowledgeable at each level to develop a program which fits the needs of their level. In smaller schools or school districts, it may be possible for the entire committee to work as a unit.

Whenever a committee has developed their plans in conjunction with the consultant, it then becomes the consultant's responsibility to see that such plans are implemented and carried out. In some instances this may mean the consultant will work with the principal of a building to see that sufficient materials are ordered or grade level meetings held. Sometimes it is helpful for the consultant and the principal to observe a reading lesson together. If in-service work is planned, the consultant might wish to investigate and recommend to the committee people eligible to teach the course or to appear as guest speakers. It may be the reading committee will wish to use teachers from their own staff who practice good procedures. In this case the consultant

might be the person who would plan the course with the teachers, teaching particular areas himself.

The consultant needs to constantly feed information pertaining to the results of the implemented program to the committee and seek suggestions which will further the program. Programs initiated by the reading committee should be carefully evaluated from time to time to ascertain their effectiveness. If a course of action results in no appreciable improvement in the reading program, then it should be modified or discontinued.

As the reading committee delves into various aspects of the reading program, it will find itself often becoming involved in matters allied to reading but also encompassing other areas of the curriculum. The reading committee may wish to make suggestions concerning the teaching of reading to members of the content area departments or request that they be present at some meetings for consultation with the committee. Guidance people and psychologists will become involved in matters of record keeping and testing. As a result of parent involvement in the committee, it may be that adult education, PTA representatives and other community groups may become involved.

Thus we can see that a reading committee organized to evaluate and guide a reading program within a district may have tremendous impact on the total school program. Its eventual

outcome may be to change many areas of the curriculum. The committee can be of immeasurable help to the consultant, freeing him for more direct contact with teachers.

A reading committee's success depends upon the sincerity of higher administrative officials who support it, of members of the committee who believe in its importance, of the reading consultant who work towards the accomplishment of the committee's decisions, as well as the teachers who cooperate by complying with the decisions of the committee.

REFERENCE

1. Robinson, H. Alan, and Rauch, Sidney J. Guiding the Reading Program. Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1965.